

# Ethical Guidelines

## Deutsche Vereinigung für Gestalttherapie e.V.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The aim of these ethical guidelines is to provide the members of the DVG with orientation for the ethical aspects of their professional activities.

They shall serve to

- describe ethical standards for the professional behaviour of gestalt therapists,
- inform people which use services of DVG members,
- provide a basis for reviewing complaints.

Members of the DVG have the responsibility to observe the principles laid down in these ethical guidelines and to use them as a basis for responsible implementation in their practice.

These ethics guidelines shall **apply to** all members of the DVG, i.e. all full, supporting and institutional members. The institutional members shall require their trainers, training therapists and supervisors to observe these ethical guidelines (even if they are not members of the DVG).

### **2. COMPETENCE**

Therapists have a special responsibility to further their competence by means of personal and professional development, regular supervision, further training and personal therapy. Competence also includes recognising one's own limits and acting accordingly.

### **3. RESPONSIBILITY**

Members of the DVG will endeavour to be transparent and honest and will not make any false or misleading statements, e.g. in regard to their training, co-operation with institutions, relationships with colleagues or the potential effectiveness of their services.

Members of the DVG will act on the understanding that their personal backgrounds influence their work, that they are responsible to the communities and societies in which they live and work and will take into consideration the environments from which their clients come and in which they live.

### **4. THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLIENT AND THERAPIST**

- 4.1. Irrespective of the intimacy that can arise the client-therapist relationship is and remains a professional relationship. In therapy and counseling for multi-person systems (couples, families, self-awareness groups, for example), the leader takes an impartial position.
- 4.2. The DVG members recognize the importance of the relationship for an effective therapy. They are aware of the power of influence associated with the therapeutic situation; they act in a way that is consistent with that knowledge. They are aware that the clients themselves as well as their issues and concerns need to be treated respectfully.
- 4.3. No subject of human behaviour or experience shall be excluded from the communication in the therapeutic relationship. However, concrete behaviour that violates the boundaries of the agreed upon form of relationship shall be excluded.
- 4.4. Physical contact that is part of the therapy will be oriented exclusively towards the well-being of the client and requires special care, which can, for example, consist in obtaining the specific consent of the client.
- 4.5. Members of the DVG will not under any circumstances entertain sexual relationships with their clients. In view of the nature of the therapeutic relationship they will recognise that the termination of therapy is not automatically associated with a change in the relationship and that time is needed to separate from each other.
- 4.6. DVG members do not use their clients materially, politically, sexually, religiously/spiritually, emotionally or for other personal reasons for their own benefit and their own needs. They observe the principle of neutrality and do not impose a special view on their issues on the client.

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- 4.7. DVG members ensure that therapeutic relationships are not burdened by multiple forms of relationships (e.g. relatives, friends, employees, superiors, former private partners, spiritual teachers). They are sensitive to the fact that such mixtures limit their professional judgment.

### **5. STRUCTURING OF THE THERAPEUTIC WORKING RELATIONSHIP**

#### **5.1 Clarification of the basic conditions**

The basic conditions of therapy, such as financial agreements, the obligation to professional confidentiality and terminations and cancellation of sessions will be clearly discussed and agreed upon at the start of therapy.

All changes in the basic conditions will be newly negotiated. In the event that clients who are already in therapeutic treatment elsewhere request consultations the therapist will critically consider whether it is responsible to accept the client for therapy. Other forms of remuneration apart from fee payments are as a rule to be avoided.

#### **5.2 Duration and termination of the therapeutic working relationship**

The duration of a therapy, referrals and the termination of therapy will be discussed with the clients and where possible decided upon jointly.

Since the termination phase is an important part of the therapeutic process, the working relationship should not be ended abruptly.

DVG members will terminate a working relationship when:

- the therapeutic process is considered to have been concluded by both therapist and client;
- the therapist has reached the limits of his/her professional skill and/or capacity to cope with stress: s/he will then endeavour to find suitable professional support for the client;
- it becomes sufficiently clear that the client no longer requires it, does not profit from it, no longer wishes it and/or would be harmed if it were to continue.

#### **5.3 Confidentiality**

Clients' personal data and all contents of a therapy are to be treated confidentially by the therapist. This also applies to supervision and intervision; the colleagues consulted are also bound to observe confidentiality. The client's consent will be sought for electronic recordings of sessions.

In the case of written publications and lectures containing case descriptions either the clients in question will give their written consent or the examples will be disguised in such a way that the clients cannot be identified.

The duty to maintain confidentiality also remains binding after the professional relationship has been terminated.

A limitation on the duty to observe confidentiality is given in the event that a client is a danger to her-/himself and others.

### **6. DATA PROTECTION**

#### **6.1. Handling of files**

DVG members will handle files that they open, keep, pass on or destroy with confidentiality and in accordance with the statutory requirements. DVG members will make arrangements for the event of their death, unfitness for work or of their leaving their jobs or giving up practical work, so that confidential assessment reports or other documentation remain protected.

#### **6.2. Confidential information in data collection systems**

The handling of confidential information in data collection systems must meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Personal data must be encoded, anonymised or deleted when the purpose for which they were stored no longer exists.

### **7. ADVERTISING**

- 7.1. Advertising will remain limited to descriptive statements on the service offered the qualifications of the person offering it.

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- 7.2. Advertising will not contain any testimonies by witnesses, comparative claims or expressions that convey the impression that the service offered is more effective than those offered by other schools of therapy or organisations.

### **8. SOLVING ETHICAL PROBLEMS**

- 8.1. DVG members will familiarise themselves with the ethical guidelines and consider how they can be applied to their work.
- 8.2. In the event that members' attention is drawn to possible conflicts between their behaviour and the guidelines they will answer to the accusations and be open to dialogue and/or argument. If necessary they will engage the support of third persons.
- 8.3. In the event that members believe that others have violated these guidelines they will consider whether to speak to the colleague in question directly or whether first to get support.
- 8.4. The Ethics and Arbitration Committee of the DVG and its members are bound to mutual co-operation.
- 8.5. The Ethics and Arbitration Committee offers the members both supportive advice on ethical issues and arbitration in concrete procedures. The members of the Ethics and Arbitration Committee are bound by a duty to observe confidentiality in accordance with the procedural rules of the Ethics and Arbitration Committee.

### **9. TRAINING**

- 9.1. All DVG members who are responsible for training programmes in gestalt therapy will ensure full transparency of the mutual rights and duties in training structures and contracts.  
Contracts will be terminable by both parties  
DVG members responsible for training programmes will commit themselves to informing their trainees about changes in the situation regarding legislation on professional activities and the ethical guidelines.
- 9.2. Training of family members and relations within the same member institute does not comply with the Ethics Guidelines of the DVG.
- 9.3. Members of the DVG who are responsible for training programmes will take on the special, double responsibility for working with their trainees therapeutically and supportively on the one hand while on the other training the same people professionally and critically judging their competence on the other. This requires special care and alertness in dealings with the trainees
- 9.4. Training institutes commit themselves to a conscious and responsible handling of multiple roles. From this it follows in particular: Reference trainers/program leaders, leaders of a training group and regular trainers cannot act as teaching therapists for members of this training group. If teaching therapists are involved in training to a limited extent, it must be ensured that they are not involved in assessing the progress of the training.
- 9.5. All behaviors of trainers towards trainees that are guided by considerations not related to training or self-interests (material, social, emotional, political, religious / spiritual or sexual in nature or for other personal reasons) are to be viewed as an abuse of power, even if this is desired by the trainee.
- 9.6. The confidentiality of training therapies conducted by training institutes of the DVG is protected under § 6.3 of the Ethics Guidelines; the trainees can release their training therapists from the obligation to observe confidentiality towards their trainers.  
The contents of §§ 4, 3 and 5 and 10.2 of the Ethics Guidelines are to be guaranteed.
- 10.7. The training institutes of the DVG will place all teaching staff involved in their training and continuing training programmes and all their training therapists under an obligation to observe

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the Ethics Guidelines of the DVG, irrespective of whether the individual members of staff are members of the DVG.

### **10. COUNSELING/SUPERVISION**

10.1. The contents of §§ 3, 5, 6.3, 7, 8, 9 and 10.2 and 10.3 of the Ethics Guidelines for therapy also apply to supervision and counseling.

10.2. DVG members will distinguish between supervision, counseling and therapeutic settings, in order to be able to establish clear relationship structures.

10.3. The basic conditions of counseling and supervision, such as financial agreements, obligation to confidentiality and terminations and cancellation of sessions will be clearly discussed and agreed upon at the start of the supervision. All changes in the basic condition will be re-negotiated.

### **11. RESEARCH**

When including psychotherapeutic treatments in research projects members of the DVG will reflect on the significance and effects for their clients and their own work and will be responsible

- for informing their clients about the research project,
- for obtaining [the client's] fundamental consent to participate and also to special forms of visual and acoustic participation.
- for protecting the personal rights and dignity of the client/clients.

They will check the contents, methods and objectives for professional quality, expedience and ethical justifiability.

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